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ABSTRACT

Research on moral development from a cognitive-developmental perspective has been undertaken predominantly with Western subjects and most often with males. To investigate variables associated with moral reasoning among Palestinian Arabs, 259 male and female university students between the ages of 18 and 26 completed Rest's Defining Issues Test which measures percentage of principled reasoning. An analysis of the results showed that percentage of principled reasoning was significantly related to years in school but not to age, matriculation examination score, or mass media usage. Persons who did not report practicing their religion scored significantly higher than practitioners. Subjects who had taken a course in cultural studies, philosophy, or law scored higher on the Defining Issues Test than those who had not, and the residents of rural areas scored higher than city dwellers. Christian males scored lower than Christian females and all Muslims. The study provides cross-cultural support for a general cognitive-developmental theory of moral development. (Author/BL)

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A Study of Moral Reasoning by Palestinian Arabs

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Abstract

Moral reasoning of Palestinian Arabs was investigated in a cross-sectional study consisting of 259 male and female subjects, most of whom were university students between the ages of 18 and 26. Rest's Defining Issues Test, an objective measure of moral development from a cognitive-developmental perspective, was used to assess percentage of principled reasoning. Percentage of principled reasoning was found to be significantly related to years in school but not to age, matriculation examination score, or mass media usage. Persons who did not reportedly practice their religion scored significantly higher than practitioners. Subjects who had taken a course in cultural studies, philosophy, or law scored significantly higher on the Defining Issues Test than those who had not and residents of rural areas scored higher than city dwellers. Interestingly, Christian males scored lower than Christian females and all Muslims. All things considered, the results of the study provide cross-cultural support for a general cognitive-developmental theory of moral development.

A Study of Moral Reasoning by Palestinian Arabs

The overall purpose of this study was to investigate moral reasoning and variables associated with it among Palestinian Arabs. Following Piaget, Kohlberg (1958) found in his data a six stage sequence in patterns of moral reasoning. According to his cognitive-developmental theory, the developmental sequence of these underlying patterns or stages is invariant and culturally universal, although the highest stages may not be attained in all cultures (Kohlberg, 1969; Kohlberg & Kramer, 1969). Research on moral development from a cognitive-developmental perspective has been undertaken predominantly with Western subjects and most often with males (Gilligan, 1982).

Kohlberg and Kramer (1969) refered to research on subjects in Yucatan, Taiwan, and Turkey which supported the culturally universal assertion of the cognitive theory of moral development. In a study of mothers, fathers, and one child from 39 upper-middle class Indian families, Parikh (1980) found that in Moral Maturity Scores, mothers were higher than their 12-13 year old children but not their 15-16 year old children. Edwards (1974) showed that among 103 Kenya secondary school and university students, multi-cultural secondary school student body, boarding school living, non-authoritarian home life, and university study

of Social Science and Law related to higher Moral Maturity Scores (more "conventional" reasoning).

Gorsuch and Barnes (1973) found that among 71 young Carib (Belize) males, younger subjects scored lower than older subjects and town dwellers were more advanced than villagers in moral reasoning. In a study of elders of a Kipsigis community in Kenya, six traditional leaders (men considered morally outstanding and used to settle disputes) scored significantly higher on the Kohlberg scale than six matched men who were not considered leaders (Harkness, Edwards, & Super, 1981). Maqsud (1980) found that the movement from objective to subjective responsibility continued to develop during adolescence in the 90 13-16 year old Muslim Hausa (Nigerian) males, with different trends in boarding and day school students.

Bar-Yam, Kohlberg, and Naame (1980) studied 115 adolescent subjects in Israel and indicated that differences in moral reasoning could be related to differences in educational background and experience. Kibbutz-born subjects had higher moral reasoning levels than other groups measured. Middle-class and Youth Aliyah subjects were higher than lower class subjects. Middle-class Muslim and Christian Arabs were similar to the Turkish middle class, the Oriental Jweish lower class, and working-class Americans. The 21 adolescent Muslim females had lower moral maturity levels than the 16 Muslim males, the 26 Christian males, and the

14 Christian females. There were no sex differences between kibbutz-born subjects. Bar-Yam et al. felt that Muslim females had fewer opportunities for decision-making than the others studied, due to societal patterns.

In a longitudinal (three year) and cross-sectional study of 426 Bahamian male and female 8-17 year olds, White, Bushnell, and Regnemer (1978) found change primarily due to time of testing, with some influence of age and cohort factors. There was a general upward stage movement. A sex difference occured in only one of many analyses performed (13-14 year old males higher in 1974 analysis).

The Moral Maturity Scores of 74 male Turkish subjects were used in cross-sectional and partial longitudinal analyses of moral development (Nisan & Kohlberg, 1982; Turiel, Edwards, & Kohlberg, 1978). A few of the 22 longitudinal subjects were interviewed as many as four times. Villagers matured at a slower rate than city dwellers. Subjects progressed through the hypothesized series of stages, some up to Stage 4. Responses to the adapted Kohlberg dilemmas could be classified according to one of the standard stage structures. The need for a much larger body of research on moral development in various cultures was re-emphasized.

Rest (1974) has developed an objective, paper-and-pencil test of reasoning about moral dilemmas, based on Kohlberg's

stages. Subjects choose statements most closely resembling their reasoning about solutions of the dilemmas. A percentage of principled reasoning (Stages 5A, 5B, and 6) score, the P Index, is given. Among the variables found to be related to the P Index are age, education, age-education, and type of courses taken (e.g. Ethics). It can be argued that Kohlberg's interview measures production of reasons while Rest measures recognition; subjects may score higher when asked to recognize reasons than they would when asked to produce reasons (Rest, 1979). In his book on moral development and his Defining Issues Test, Rest (1979) noted that there was no discussion of cross-cultural studies and called this a major neglected area of inquiry.

By looking at moral reasoning in a Palestinian Arab sample, the present study was designed to help remedy the dearth of non-Western data related to moral reasoning. Questions addressed in this study are: 1) Is percentage of principled reasoning related to age, number of years in school, type of courses taken, and secondary school matriculation examination score? 2) Is percentage of principled reasoning related to sex, media usage, religion, religious practice, and area of residence? 3) Is data obtained from a non-Western group different from that obtained from Westerners?

Method

259 Palestinian Arab subjects, ranging from senior high school students to persons in middle adulthood, completed Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT). The subjects were invited to participate in a survey of social attitudes and no course credit or other rewards were offered for participation. The majority of the subjects were aged 18-26 and were enrolled in a Middle Eastern Arab college which had a total enrollment of about 1000.

The Defining Issues Test was translated into Arabic and the translation was carefully checked for accuracy. In a few instances, minor adaptations were made to make the DIT more culturally appropriate. Added to the instrument were questions related to other variables, including name (optional, to be used for possible later longitudinal study), age, sex, religion, religious practice, education, courses taken in cultural studies, philosophy, and law, residence, mass media usage, and secondary school matriculation examination score (Tawjihi).

The dependent variable in this study was the P Index score from the DIT (the percentage of principled reasoning statements chosen by the subject). Subjects were exposed to six Kohlberg-type moral dilemmas and for each dilemma 12 stage-related statements were given. The subject was then asked to choose the four statements which most closely resembled the reasoning used in making the decision about the dilemma. The independent

variables were those additional variables cited above, such as age, sex, religion, and religious practice.

Results

The descriptive-correlational results of this study were generally consistent in support of the cognitive-developmental hypothesis. Significant correlations were found between percentage of principled reasoning (the P Index score) and practice of religion, r (257) = -.26, $p < .01$; years in school, r (255) = .16, $p < .05$; taking courses in cultural studies, law, or philosophy, r (257) = .20, $p < .01$; residence, r (257) = .145, $p < .05$; and religion, r (257) = .122, $p < .05$. Not significantly related to the P Index score were sex, r (257) = .06, $p > .10$; age, r (257) = .08, $p > .10$; and mass media usage, r (255) = .02, $p > .10$. Matriculation examination was also not related to the P Index score, r (195) = .01, $p > .10$; scores on the matriculation examination were not available for subjects still in secondary school. For years in school and taking a course in cultural studies, law, or philosophy, r (255) = .23, $p < .01$. The correlation between age and years in school was .088, $p < .10$. Results of an overall multiple regression analysis indicated that 12.5% of the variance in percentage of principled reasoning could be accounted for in an equation with the following variables variables entered (percentage of variability accounted for by each variable in parenthesis): practice of religion (6.8%), courses taken in cultural studies, law, or philosophy (3.2%),

sex (1.1%), religion (.6%), residence (.4%), age (.4%), and years in school (.1%).

In order to further clarify the findings reported above, analysis of variance was also performed. Subjects who had taken at least one course in cultural studies, law, or philosophy (M = 32.6) were found to be significantly higher in percentage of principled reasoning than subjects who had not taken such a course (M = 28), F (1, 257) = 10.76, $p < .001$. Persons with rural residence (n = 29, M = 33.7) were significantly higher on the P Index than city dwellers (n = 230, M = 28.9), F (1, 257) = 5.58, p = .02. Non-practitioners of their religion (M = 34.3) were significantly higher than practitioners (M = 27.9), F (1, 257) = 19.35, $p < .0001$. A 2 (religion) X 2 (sex) factorial analysis of variance showed a main effect for religion, F (1, 255) = 4.56, p = .034, no main effect for sex, F (1, 255) = 1.47, p = .23, and a significant interaction, F (1,255) = 4.55, p = .034. Muslim men (M = 30.7), Muslim women (M = 29.9), and Christian women (M = 30.3) were about the same in percentage of principled reasoning, while the Mean for Christian men was 25.4.

Discussion

In this study evidence is provided indicating that moral reasoning becomes more principled as a function of number of years of schooling, but moral reasoning is not found to be

significantly related to age. The confounding age-education relationship seems less present here than in Western samples, so education's relationship to principled reasoning level is much more in evidence. Consistent with other studies (Rest, 1979), subjects who had taken courses requiring reasoning about principles scored higher in principled reasoning than other subjects. Such courses seemed to touch on those structures and processes of reasoning which are tapped by moral reasoning and the DIT, though a causal relationship cannot be alleged from findings of the present study.

Interestingly, persons who reported that they did not practice their religion scored significantly higher in percentage of principled reasoning than persons who said they practiced. This was true for both Muslims and Christians. Perhaps religious practice is more attractive to pre-conventional and conventional moral reasoners. Strict adherence to religious tenets may put constraints on moving beyond conventional moral reasoning. Of course, other explanations of this phenomenon are also possible, e.g. "non-conformist" attitudes affecting both religious practice and moral reasoning.

It should be pointed out that the subjects in this study were a relatively well-educated group, averaging 1.2 years of college. Overall, there was no significant difference between men and women in moral reasoning. However, the Christian men in this sample were significantly lower in

percentage of principled reasoning than the Christian women and all Muslims. Since Palestinian Christian families sometimes send sons abroad for study, the Christian male sample may have been less representative of Christian males than the other groups are of their populations. With a smaller sample of younger subjects, Bar-Yam, Kohlberg, and Naame (1980) found Muslim females lower in moral reasoning than Muslim males and all Christians. One could argue that this religion-sex difference was due to the difference in sample size between the present study and the Bar-Yam et al. study. Another explanation is that the Muslim women in our study had much more opportunity for decision-making and reasoning about moral situations because of their additional educational experiences. This would be consistent with the Bar-Yam et al. explanation.

Our study found no significant difference between females and males in amount of principled reasoning. But it did not address Gilligan's (1982) contention that a morality based on female developmental patterns would be more a morality of responsibility, relationship, interdependence, and attachment than Kohlberg's rights and fairness approach.

While Gorsuch and Barnes (1974) and Turiel, Edwards, and Kohlberg (1978) found that village youths matured more slowly than town dwellers, we found that rural residents (n = 29) were significantly higher in principled reasoning than city dwellers (n = 230). Of course, this disparity in sample size

should call for caution concerning our finding in this instance. But it should be noted that our subjects living in rural areas were, for the most part, commuting university students. So this finding may be the result of measurement later in the developmental process, after significant educational experience. Finally, the secondary school matriculation examination score could be expected to have no relationship to percentage of principled reasoning, since the former appears to draw primarily on specific memorized information, while the DIT does not.

Despite the studies cited earlier, the body of cross-cultural research literature on moral development is quite small. While not longitudinal, our study had more subjects than all but one of the studies described above and included both sexes, which some did not. Our sample was also older than most and better educated. The significance of the present study is that its relatively large group of non-Western subjects provides support for the cognitive-developmental description of moral reasoning and development, which was formulated with Western subjects. Future research should be longitudinal when possible and should be designed to investigate the specific effects of important cultural variables on moral reasoning, as Nisan and Kohlberg (1982) began to do with Turkish males. The relationship between cognitive structures, moral reasoning, and religious belief and practice should also be studied.

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Footnote

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